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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBURGEOIS, DBENZE AND  
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER  
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Pope Anti-Islam Remarks,  
Bilal, Syria/EU, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestinian Territories (9/19)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers today led with reports of Syrian Grand Mufti Badreddin Hassoun's meeting with the Papal Nuncio in Damascus, Giovanni Battista Morandini, in which Hassoun warned against inflaming a conflict between Islam and Christianity. He accused some hegemonic powers of seeking to enslave peoples of all religions, and indicated that the Pope's expression of regret over his statements has had good effect in Moslem society. The Mufti called upon the Pope to express in his next sermon what he really feels about Moslems, their belief and the Prophet. The Nuncio delivered a letter to Dr. Hassoun that includes a statement by the Pope's Secretary about the Pope's lecture at the German University of Regensburg.

All papers featured Information Minister Mohsen Bilal's interview with Lebanese weekly "Al-Shams" confirming Syria's pursuit of a just and comprehensive peace in the region. Dr. Bilal called upon the international community to support all peace efforts that guarantee the restoration of all occupied Arab territories, including the Golan and the Palestinian territories. The Minister praised the policies of Latin American countries which reject single-polar policy and US political, economical and cultural pressure. Bilal also confirmed strong Syrian-Spanish relations. He praised the Non-Allied Movement and the role that it can play as a representative of the interests of third world peoples.

On EU-Syrian relations, papers reported the final communique of the visiting European Union Mission in Damascus. The Vice-President of the European Parliament Socialist Group, Pasqualina Napoletano, said that her current visit to Syria came within the framework of resumption of relations between Syria and the European Parliament. Ms. Napoletano said that "talks between the delegation and Syrian officials came at an ideal time, considering the imminent discussion at the European parliament on a proposed decision on Syria in October." The statement said that the members of the EU delegation stressed their wish to accelerate signing of the EU-Syria Association Agreement.

On Lebanon, papers continued to report that Israeli forces are moving the Blue Line toward the Lebanese border, in the presence of the UNIFIL forces. Papers reported a statement by the Board

of Arkoub and Sheba'a Farms Citizens condemning this act and demanding an immediate and serious Lebanese move to prevent these violations of Lebanon's sovereignty. The Board demanded that UN SecGem Annan publish his report about Sheba'a Farms and Kfar Shouba Hills, in order to include the two areas in the UNIFIL mandate, as a prelude to demarcation of their borders and their restoration to Lebanese sovereignty.

On Iraq, papers reported the Conference of Interior Ministers of Countries Neighboring Iraq, in Jeddah. Syrian Interior Minister Major General Bassam Abdel-Majeed represented Syria at the meeting.

End of summary.

## 12. Selected Headlines:

"Growing Lebanese anger at the Lebanese government's positions and calls to change the Lebanese government. Lebanese figures and MPs: We will not allow US custody.... UNSC Resolution 1701 did not dictate UNIFIL deployment at airports and harbors" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/19)

"Hassoun receives a message from the Vatican which includes the Pope's regret. Hassoun: Islam and Christianity are being exposed to a war by hegemonic powers seeking to enslave peoples of all religions" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/19)

"Information Minister Bilal to Lebanese weekly 'Al-Shams': Syria seeks a just and comprehensive peace" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/19)

"The EU Parliamentarian delegation concludes visit to Damascus: We wish to accelerate signing of the EU-Syria Association Agreement" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/19)

"Interior Ministers of Countries Neighboring Iraq sign a protocol for security cooperation. Syrian Interior Minister Abdel-Majeed: Syria supports a unified Iraq and is exerting maximum efforts to achieve stability in Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/19)

"New clashes hinder a session of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Israel links the destiny of Dueik and his comrades to the destiny of Shalit and extends period of their arrest" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/19)

## 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"Route to Stability"

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Muhammad Khayr al-Jammali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (9/19): "There is a link between peace in the Middle East and the stability of the entire world.... Many world leaders have come to realize this fact and to call for a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

"The lack of peace in the region is caused by Israel's hostile expansionist tendency and by American neoconservatives' desire to redraw the Middle East map in accordance with their narrow strategic interests....

"In the final analysis, this means that the road to a possible solution capable of ensuring the region's stability and world peace begins and ends with Israel abandoning its hostile role and occupation of Arab territories, which lie behind all the tensions and explosions. It also means that the neoconservatives must abandon their imperial plan, which has led the region to a state of tension that threatens the gravest and most disastrous consequences. There must also be a return to the implementation, in text and in spirit, of international resolutions relevant to the conflict, in a way that removes the causes of the conflict, namely, Israel's occupation of Arab territories, the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq, the US bias

toward Israel, and the policy of unilateralism and double standards pursued by the neoconservatives...."

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### "Expanding the Cycle of Victory"

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Dr. Khalaf al-Jarrad, Chief Editor of government-owned Tishreen, wrote (9/19): "Israel has utterly failed to achieve any of the declared objectives of its destructive barbaric war against Lebanon and its valiant resistance. The United States, consequently, has failed to bring to life its New Middle East plan. This, however, does not mean that the attempts to eliminate the Resistance as a policy, thought, ideology, and culture, will stop...."

"Naturally, planners of the latest Israeli war against Lebanon, and those who encouraged Olmert's government and supplied it with highly destructive weapons, and those who stressed that the results of the war against Lebanon and its heroic Resistance would constitute a serious strategic leap toward the creation of the New Middle East, will not surrender to this major failure. They will not keep silent or lose hope. They will continue to mobilize their forces and elaborately reread what happened to draw conclusions and learn the reasons of the setback and how to turn the defeat into success. They will also benefit from some local parties that are working to turn the victory of the Lebanese people and their Resistance into a domestic defeat...."

"To confront this situation, we expect not only the leadership of the Resistance and the entire nationalist movement in Lebanon, but also all forces that oppose the American-Zionist

hegemonic plans, to conduct an in-depth study of the proceedings, facts, lessons, and various aspects of the recent war in order to benefit from its achievements and positive results, on the one hand, and to draw up a strategy responding to the popular awakening that supports the Resistance and its policy, thought, and culture, on the other. This way, the victory of the Resistance in Lebanon will turn into a strong lever, a firm foundation, and a historic introduction to other victories against modern, pro-Israel forces of international hegemony."

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### "Palestinian National Unity Government and Western Pressure"

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Ibrahim Shugayr, a columnist in government-owned in Al-Ba'th, wrote (9/19): "Forming a Palestinian national unity government remains a pressing need to break the political and economic siege, end the suffering, release the ministers, MPs, and prisoners, and activate the Palestinian issue on the international level...."

"Formation of this government faces European reservations, American rejection, and Israel obstruction.... The American position is identical to Israel's.... US officials have warned Fatah that it will be isolated if it joins a government that does not accept Western conditions. Perhaps this was the reason behind suspension of consultations on forming this government...."

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### "The Hell"

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As'ad Abbud, an op-ed writer in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (9/19): "There is increasing intervention in politics by religious leaders worldwide after the collapse of the Soviet Union.... Religious influence received another boost from the current US Administration, in the form of religious

fundamentalism in a secularist cloak or political fundamentalism in a religious cloak...

"This resulted in a real conflict among religious ideologies, with people trying to ease the destructive impact of the conflict.... The US Administration placed the world between two extremisms: Zionist extremism, represented by the Jews and their alliance with Christian fundamentalism in the United States, in particular, and the world, in general, and Islamic extremism, represented by takfiri and salafi organizations.... Some parties are fanning the flames of this conflict....

"Involvement of clergymen in politics, including the Vatican Pope and other Sheikhs, extremists, bishops, and cardinals, sets political work back and leads to burial of the struggles of humanity, struggles that were aimed at building free, secular, civil society....

"Responding to the Pope is not the duty of Muslims alone. It is also the duty of Christians and secularists, regardless of their schools of thought. It is also the duty of humanity, whose thinkers must offer a new vision of a world full of human culture, free of sects...."

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"Darfur, back to the Scene"

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Jamal al-Zu'bi, a commentator in government-owned Al-Ba'th, said (9/19): "The United States seeks to control the huge resources of Sudan through international intervention in Darfur....

"Regardless of support for or opposition to the deployment of international forces in Darfur, these forces certainly remain one of Washington's instruments to pursue its policies and achieve its objectives in Sudan. Their mission definitely does not include protecting the Sudanese, of whatever group...."

Corbin